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Transcript for Episode 04: The Force of the Fox: Governor Forrest Anderson's Leadership & Political Acumen

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[Begin Alec Hansen-Governor Forrest Anderson's Leadership & Political Acumen]

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[Music]

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Narrator: From the beginning of Montana's distinctive yet troubled history, the Treasure State was dominated both economically and politically by powerful outside interests who shipped in capital and bought control of the State.

00:00:14

Historians tell us that as the Anaconda Company and its friends ran Montana, economic and political power flowed out into the hands of distant capitalists and corporations.

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Policy was determined in far off New York City and control of the press was rigid. Anaconda's corporate dominance in Montana's political affairs was unique in American history. For its first 75 years, Montana was a one-company State. But then big winds of change roared across the Treasure State; between 1965 and 1980 Montanans ripped off their copper collar, transforming Montana from a corporate colony into a free modern State.

00:00:55

The people finally controlled their own destiny. The pitched battle between the people and the established power structure was not easily won but fired In a Crucible of Change a new Montana was born. Join Evan Barrett and real history makers of the time as they shine the light on this remarkable era.

00:01:17

Evan Barrett: Welcome to another episode of In the Crucible of Change. And today we're going to have a chance to talk about one of the absolutely most important persons in creating the dramatic period of progressive change in Montana and that is Former Governor Forrest Anderson. And we're--we have a really special guest today who served on Forrest's staff and that's Alec Hansen. Alec went to work for Governor Anderson in September of 1969 which was about two weeks after I showed up there to work on the--his reorganization effort.

00:01:59

And you were there through most of his entire term in office and--and I want to mention that the thing that struck me about--as when one looks back at Forrest is--is how uniquely qualified he was to be Governor and what a difference that made that he had served in the Legislature for a term. He had been a County Attorney. He had been on the Supreme Court and had been Attorney General for 12 years prior to becoming Governor. So it's almost hard to find anyone that would have been as well-prepared as a Governor as--as Forrest was when he--when he entered that--that office.

00:02:41

Alec Hansen: Well I think you can probably go back through Montana history and you would never find somebody that brings that level of qualification to the office. Like you said, he was a County Attorney here in Lewis & Clark, he'd been on the Supreme Court, he'd served in the Legislature as a Representative of Helena, and he had 12 years of experience as Attorney General. And a lot of that was very you know vital experience, a lot dealing with institutions and he was involved in the prison riot in Deer Lodge in the late '50s. And so when he stepped into that office, he had you know he--he was qualified.

00:03:20

Evan Barrett: He was ready.

00:03:20

Alec Hansen: And he had the relevant experience and I think you know a lot of people have a tough time finding their feet when they first assume a political office, you know and you hear the term *hit the ground running*, I don't even know if that was there in those days. I mean I don't know if that term was even used. But if it was he was the guy that did it. I mean they started off right away with some really good ideas and--.

00:03:45

You know the thing that's amazing is this guy promoted probably as much change and new progressive ideas as anybody in the history of Montana and he was a one-term Governor.

00:03:55

Evan Barrett: It is pretty astounding and if you--and the change actually when you think about it the 1968 Election that there had been 16 years of Republican Governors. And the power structure of Montana was clearly locked into place. He--the Anaconda Company was very, very strong still; the Montana Power Company, the corporate interests, the Stock Growers. He came into office after that 16 years of Republican Governors. His--but it wasn't easy for him. He had a challenge right on the Democratic side, the Progressive side in the Primary. He had to run against primarily Eugene Mahoney who was the Senate Majority Leader in 1967 and had successfully fended off the sales tax in the Legislature in '67. So he was kind of the darling of the left if you will and Leroy Anderson, another Andersen who was the Eastern District Congressman who was a Democrat, those two together ran against Forrest in the Democratic Primary.

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And Forrest ended up with about 39-percent of the vote; Mahoney had about 35-percent of the vote. Andersen, Leroy Anderson was way behind but he sprung out of that to run against Tim Babcock who was the incumbent Governor. And you know you don't beat incumbent Governors very often and yet his win over Tim Babcock was fairly dramatic. He--he won by 12-percentage points, 54-percent to 42-percent. It was a dramatic win.

00:05:34

You were working in the press at that time in 1968 just coming out of Vietnam and working with *Montana Standard* weren't you?

00:05:44

Alec Hansen: Yeah; I had started at the *Standard* in November of '68. I wasn't involved at all in that election campaign. Most of what I know about that I read or I--people told me. But I think one thing that's you know that's important in that particular campaign, you know Forrest was what they called pragmatic or practical. I mean he was a common sense guy. And he got accused for being middle of the road. And he said one time, yeah; I'm middle of the road because that's where the people of Montana are. They're in the middle of the road and I represent them.

00:06:17

And I think that showed up in that election. I think you know you might have had Mahoney on one side and Leroy on the other side. Forrest was right there in the middle where the votes were and that's probably how he won.

00:06:28

And I think when you get into the fall against Tim Babcock you know that's when *Pay More What For* came along. I mean Duke Crowley came up with that. That's probably the most effective well known political slogan in Montana history and it's the simple things. You know if you elect me there's not going to be a sales tax. And it won't be tried and I won't even think about it. If you elect the other guy you might have to deal with that. And I think people in Montana didn't want--I think they were concerned about how ineffective government was and they sure as hell didn't want to pay any more than they had already paid. And that was the whole heart of that slogan.

00:07:04

It's a few words but the--simple words but delivers a very powerful message.

00:07:10

Evan Barrett: Well yeah; you think of those four words--Pay More What For--seemed to be the driving thing in that entire election and it--again that sprung out of the big, big fight they had in '67 where Jim [Felt] was the Speaker of the House and they really hard--pushed the sales tax very, very hard and it took--and the Democrats and the Senate under Mahoney fought it back. And I think the fact that it had been a big issue for Mahoney and he didn't survive the Primary, I think some people thought maybe Forrest wouldn't be as tough on it. But he--he had the instinct I think to say I can take these four words--*Pay More What For*--and I can convey a message to Montanans that they'll listen to. And boy they did; I mean it was a big, big win for him.

00:07:53

Alec Hansen: Yeah. Up until that time that's one of the biggest pluralities in a--you know in an election for Governor of Montana history. But I mean it's a very simple message. You know and that whole thing plays out through the remainder of his term as Governor, the--you know the thing about the sales tax.

00:08:09

Now the sales tax has been a divisive and dominant issue in Montana politics you know since long before I was interested in this business. And you know in those days the Montana economy was much different than it is today. Natural Resource taxes were 30, 35, 40-percent of the total tax base of the State. And I think what the, you know the promoters of the sales tax, particularly on the corporate side what they were interested in was getting out from under property taxes or severance taxes or Natural Resource taxes and shifting the burden from production to consumption.

00:08:47

Well that's not a good deal for the working man. And that's what--you know that's where you are when you're in the middle of the road. Those are the guys that you represent. Those are the people, those working people; those are the people that put him in there, the guys in Butte, Anaconda, and Billings, wherever they might be in the refineries. And why should they pay on consumption when these corporations were perfectly capable of paying on production and value?

00:09:13

So you know that was the whole idea there. That's the philosophical question. But since that time and I'm guilty of this, I've changed my opinion a little bit on the sales tax namely because I work for the City so we need the money. But the other reason is--is the economy has changed dramatically. You know the property tax base now, a majority of the property tax base is homeowners. And so every time somebody needs some money [*Phone Rings*] whether it's a school district, a city, a county, an irrigation district, or whoever it is they go to the property taxpayer.

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And we've got a \$3 billion tourist economy in this State and those people essentially get a free ride all the time they're in Montana.

00:09:53

Evan Barrett: Would you say that if you put it up for a vote again though that--what would happen to a sales tax?

00:09:58

Alec Hansen: It would probably get beat. I mean they're--this is Montana; here it is. I'll--I'll summarize Montana for you in my mind. It's hunting, fishing, church on Sunday, football on Friday night, no sales tax; that's Montana.

That's how I see it. And gee Mark Roscoe had it on the ballot in 1992; he was a very popular Governor. I mean that thing got beat you know three to--

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Evan Barrett: Four to one.

00:10:22

Alec Hansen: --three to one.

00:10:23

Evan Barrett: Three to one, 75-percent against it; yeah.

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Alec Hansen: I mean that's--I don't know what it is in Montana that whether they understand the idea about consumption and production and the value of it or they just don't like loose change. But a sales tax is not popular.

00:10:35

Evan Barrett: And that--and that sales tax leveraging that was done by Forrest in the election was really one of the critical beginnings of this whole era of change.

00:10:47

Alec Hansen: Oh yeah.

00:10:47

Evan Barrett: And it--it opened the door for that long period. We're looking at a period from 1965 to 1980. And that involves the '67 Legislature and the 68 election. And then one Forrest got in, in 1969. Now he was a--and we'll come back to the sales tax because after the Babcock loss in 1968 when they went to the '69 Session in spite of the

big brouhaha in '67 they pulled in their horns. They said well that's been decided. You know Forrest beat Tim pretty bad; we're not going to do the sales tax.

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Now there are other battles that occurred in 1969 Session that then followed and then '71 it became--it rose again; the sales tax rose again, and we'll get back into that. But in the meantime, in 1969 Session when Forrest came in as he had talked a bit during the--during the election he said we've got to get this government in order and went after the reorganization as one of his primary things.

00:11:57

Alec Hansen: Well up until that time State government was a real mess. I mean there are 160 independent Boards and Commissions. There was no accountability and you know you had the--everybody had a Commission or a Board or something like that. And you know if you wanted a--you know if somebody made a mistake the government was virtually powerless to deal with that. I mean you know if somebody on the Fish & Game or the Liquor Control Board had done something wrong or wasn't representing the people or doing the services that--providing the services that they were supposed to be--you know that they were hired, it really wasn't much you could do about it. And so the whole idea and the structure was so--so diffused and unaccountable, I mean you just couldn't make things happen. You couldn't move things forward. And the Executive Authority was you know virtually non-existent. And you know a long--most of the Authority you know was held by the Legislature and you know we had a lot of Governors, but you know they were in a lot of just kind of caretakers.

00:13:08

Evan Barrett: Well it's almost--you can almost make the case that the diffused structure of State government simply empowered the power structure outside of government.

00:13:19

Alec Hansen: Yeah; you know and that was exactly and the corporations, the special interests, whoever, however you want to call them I mean they relied on the Legislature. Those guys figured it out. You know I was down in Bozeman one night at a City Council meeting and we had a very positive result and we got essentially what we were

trying to do and it happened. And we had a really good discussion about it. And I was driving home and I was thinking why the hell doesn't the Legislature work like this? You know and then it came to me. And Anaconda, Montana Power, the railroads, everybody else understood a long, long time ago it's easier to deal with 150 people locked up in a building in Helena in the middle of the winter for 60 days than it is to go out and deal with 56 counties and 129 cities and towns.

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And this State for all of its progressive you know attitudes and in terms of local control and I'm getting into my business here a little bit but that's--that fits into what we're talking about here, in terms of local control Montana is--is way behind most of the States in the West and that's--it relates to what was going on back in--before 1971 when Executive Reorganization was--was passed that the Legislature is where the power was and that's where the influence could be applied and that's why you know we'll deal with this in Helena next winter.

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Evan Barrett: So the--the Reorganization really was to bring control to a Governor and--and take away some of the external control. And the other thing that struck me is--and I remember Forrest saying this when he referred; he said you know we'll get all the nuts in the cage together. Remember when he said that? And he--and--and he meant the bureaucrats because either the power structure on the outside was empowered or the bureaucrats were empowered but the elected officials were not empowered.

00:15:31

Alec Hansen: No.

00:15:31

Evan Barrett: And that was the change he made was to go after that. And there was a strategic genius in what he did but I wonder if you might talk about it--kind of what you sense his strategic genius is.

00:15:43

Alec Hansen: Well I mean you know anybody anywhere in this country has said you want your government to be more effective, you want it to be more responsive, do you want it to be more accountable; those are all the buzzwords. And they mean something. And you know there's a practical meaning to every one of those words. And that's what it was all about. The government was out of control. It was spending too much money. Periodic budget crises just like now; you know you go from a surplus to a deficit and you know people were concerned about you know the Republicans trying to apply a new tax to fund the government that really didn't work.

00:16:23

So the whole idea in *20's Plenty* and the whole idea all through the campaign we talked about efficiency and getting rid of duplication and there were too many people involved and too many people getting paid and there's 160 Boards and Commissions and they've all got some part of the budget. And the whole idea is you know to--you elect the Governor. He's the Chief Executive of the State of Montana. And he should hire the people that are working for him and they should be accountable to him. And if something goes wrong he has the power to fix it.

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That's what it was all about. We didn't talk about that as much as we talked about efficiency and getting rid of duplication and things like that. I mean this is still politics and you got to use the language. But he told me one time; what this is really about--do you know what this is really about? And I--you know I said I think I do. He says no; you don't. He says what it's really about is when the next guy that gets this job has a problem he will be able to fix it. And that's what it was about, giving the Governor the authority he needed to be an effective manager which he is hired to do when he's elected. That's what it was about.

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Evan Barrett: Yeah; and part of that--you appoint Department Directors and if you need to fire one of them--

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Alec Hansen: Yeah.

00:17:47

Evan Barrett: --you fire them.

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Alec Hansen: That was it. He said you know the next guy if there's some rot in the outfit he can get rid of them. And that's exactly what it was.

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Evan Barrett: Well you know--

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Alec Hansen: I mean you can't go out and run a campaign on that. You know efficiency and duplication and those things but that sounds--

00:18:02

Evan Barrett: I don't think you'd run a campaign saying I want to be able to fire people.

00:18:05

Alec Hansen: Yeah and that sounds a lot better you know. And so then everybody said well if this happens then the Governor will have his vast patronage system you know. And it'll be--oh it'll be corrupt and it--you know if you're a friend of the Governor's you'll be taken care of. If you're not they'll send you down the road. And Forrest Anderson like I said many times is a very practical guy and somebody said something to him about patronage one time. And he said I'll tell you about the patronage system. You've got one job and you fill it; what you end up with is nine enemies and one ingrate and that was his description of the patronage system and it's perfectly accurate.

00:18:46

Evan Barrett: Yeah; yeah I always thought that was one of the--the better statements I'd ever heard. He had all these people apply for the job and then one of them is an ingrate and the rest of them are mad at you.

00:18:55

Alec Hansen: Well just--just look at it you know. There's nine guys out there that didn't get the job; well I'm better qualified than that guy. I hate the Governor. And then the guy that got the job probably doesn't think he's getting paid enough. *[Laughs]* And so--

00:19:08

Evan Barrett: Yeah; he seemed to have spoken his mind though. I remember when he went down to Miles City one day and--and he said farmers and ranchers don't pay their taxes.

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Alec Hansen: Oh well yeah; that--

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Evan Barrett: That kind of got excited--people excited a bit.

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Alec Hansen: That was one of the longer days of my life. He came in the office one day and he said I've been invited to speak to the Stock Growers Convention. I probably am the first Democrat they've ever invited. And he said you know let's--I used to write speeches for him, so he said let's get something really good, not the usual stuff but something really good, new and different, something that I can use to connect with these guys.

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And so I spent a couple days over the Department of Livestock and we did a lot of research about you know what was going on and all of the--the shenanigans and the cattle market and how the prices were being manipulated, you know. We went down and he gave this speech and he--we always--the written word was more important in those days. The Governor speeches were always on the desk the morning that they were given. And the--you know the deal was he would say that; that's what he would say. He would--the guarantee was he would make that speech. But then he would take his glasses off and sometimes all hell broke loose. So he goes down to Miles City and he gives this speech. And it was pretty good. And he finishes up with you know a kind of a tribute to the American West and the cattlemen and America will always be a great nation as long as you guys are out there,

independently you know taking--providing you know the food for the people, you know and maintaining the spirit of the West and all of this stuff. And they really liked it. And they stood up and they gave him a standing ovation.

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So he took his glasses off and he said do you like that? I said well I need to tell you--he said that speech was written by a kid from Butte who had never seen a cow. **[Laughs]** And that was me. And the real reason I come to Miles City was to tell you I don't think you guys are paying enough taxes. And I'm going to back to Helena and do something about it. **[Laughs]**

00:21:10

So we got out into the patrol car and the guy says you guys look like you're in a hurry. I said yeah; we are. **[Laughs]** So I mean yeah; that--you know and people who were trying to manage him which was impossible. You know the--it was always nervous when the glasses came off you know. But I mean most of the time when he took the glasses off and spoke off the top of his head what he really told people was what he wanted them to hear and the truth, not the stuff that's manufactured here in Helena by guys like me that wrote the speeches.

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Evan Barrett: And by the way that was a factual statement. I mean is--didn't go politically as it was.

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Alec Hansen: Yeah.

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Evan Barrett: There was an underpayment of taxes in relationship in that industry--

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Alec Hansen: It takes guts to say that at the Stock Growers Convention.

00:21:57

Evan Barrett: Yeah; no kidding. No kidding.

00:21:59

Alec Hansen: The guy had guts.

00:22:00

Evan Barrett: Yeah; yeah.

00:22:00

Alec Hansen: There was no doubt about it.

00:22:01

Evan Barrett: Yeah; no kidding. Well let's talk about--a little bit about the *20's Plenty* thing because I want to--I want to just comment about the strategic brilliance that he brought to getting that done because he went into the 19--they were going to Reorganize the Executive and we're going to make it effective and responsible, which takes power away from the established powers outside of government thinking about that and other things that took some of the strength away from the Montana Power and the Anaconda Company and the Stock Growers and the--the power structure that really had run things for decades.

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He ended up bringing a Bill forth to create 20 departments or less, so create a Reorganization Commission was the first step and the Reorganization Commission ended up--that Bill ended up being himself as Chairman and eight Legislators. But they selected a Director which was someone that he trusted which was Duke Crowley and all the research went on. And we're doing--going to do a program about Reorganization per se, but when he finished getting the Bill passed on the Reorganization which included an appropriation to fund it and to fund the staff to do the research. Then he called them back into Special Session four days after the Session was over and he signed the Bill on the sixtieth day creating the Commission. Four days later they were back in on the Special Session and he--and he shoveled to them a Constitutional Amendment that was mirrored after what was done in Colorado that said according to the Constitution there couldn't be more than 20 departments.

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And that if that were to pass it would put the force of the Constitution onto the Legislature making them do it because I think he knew that there had been eight other research studies on Reorganization that went nowhere. So he put that in and by gosh if they didn't get almost every vote for it, and it went on the ballot. And that's where the *20's Plenty* came in.

00:24:09

Alec Hansen: Yeah; well the real strategy there and it's you know it always works is you find a problem that needs to be solved. An ineffective government was a problem in Montana. I mean the government was lost. There's no doubt about it. It had no direction, no defined purpose or anything like that so you can find the problem. Then you come up with the fair solution and a fair solution was to reorganize it and get rid of all these Boards and Commissions which were really getting in the way of effective management.

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And then the third part of the deal is put a message together that people understand and believe and that-- that's how it worked. That was the strategy. The problem, the solution, and the way to sell the solution, and if you look at the election on Executive Reorganization it passed every county in the State of Montana. It got 70-percent of the votes. And that was an effective combination of a problem that needs to be solved, a fair solution, and a good message. And all of that came together. And the people that worked on the Executive Reorganization Commission, George [Bosman] and those people and you know guys like you--they did a tremendous amount of work. I mean that's a very complicated operation. And they were able to as I said you know and you said too is you take 156 Boards and Commissions scattered all over the place and put them into 20 departments. Well a lot of that structure is still there. The Board and Commissions are still there.

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I can remember during the election the barbers were concerned that they were going to--

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Evan Barrett: Big time with the barbers; yeah.

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Alec Hansen: --yeah the barbers were going to lose their licensing board. Well the barbers still have a licensing board, but all of those professions and whatever they're called--

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Evan Barrett: Packaged together.

00:25:47

Alec Hansen: --yeah they're very, very protective of their particular licensing board. That gives their profession credibility. And it keeps bootleggers or whatever you want to call them from coming in and cutting hair without a license, which was what this was all about in a lot of ways. **[Laughs]** And so you know that was a big problem in Reorganization but they're all still there. You--you can find them in the State phonebook if they ever publish one.

00:26:11

Evan Barrett: They're buried in it but they're structurally under control.

00:26:13

Alec Hansen: Yeah; I think they're--I think they're in the Department of Labor someplace, yeah.

00:26:16

Evan Barrett: Yeah; I remember when the Barbers Board I went out and gave a speech in Butte at what was the War Bonnet Inn I think at the time and the barbers were having a convention. And Frank **[Senate]** went over; Frank was an Assistant with you, along in the Governor's office along with you. And we went there and I gave a speech about it. And one of them stood up and he said--there were two things that were said that I remembered; one was this reorganization was your--you're trying to foist an alien form of government upon us. I remember those words; foist an alien form of government upon us.

00:26:51

Alec Hansen: Well it was alien because it was efficient.

00:26:53

Evan Barrett: Yeah and one guy got up and said now you have to 20 departments huh? And I said yeah; we have to have 20 departments or less. He said how many have you guys planned for? And I said well right now we're planning for 19. He says well take us, their one staff, and make us the 20th department. *[Laughs]*

00:27:09

Alec Hansen: Yeah; that would have been good.

00:27:11

Evan Barrett: You know so--so there was a sense that the bureaucrats were really kind of out control but always wanted to consolidate their--their little bit of power that they might have.

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Alec Hansen: You know I think--

00:27:24

Evan Barrett: He wanted the power to be in the hands of the Governor.

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Alec Hansen: You know I think when these guys came out of the shadows and started opposing this and it revealed to the people of Montana just how you know ridiculous the structure was. You know I mean some guy wanting to have a state agency devoted exclusively to barbers. Somebody down in Billings reads that in the papers and sees it on TV and says my god; the Governor is on the right track. We got to go along with this.

00:27:50

I mean yeah; I mean the--the State government has really grown and it's big. And it's--I think it's efficient. I think they do a really good job. But can you imagine spending the money we spend today on State government under the old system? I mean it would never have happened and people would have been in open revolution. I mean

you know it just couldn't happen. I mean so now you get--you elect a guy as Governor. He's the Chief Executive. He's the guy. And if somebody screws up he answers to the Governor. And the important part of that is that the Governor answers directly to the voters. And that's why the thing works. That's why it works every place else.

00:28:33

I don't think it worked that way in Montana for a while.

00:28:36

Evan Barrett: Well and again I think it--it is important to keep relating it back to the fact that if you didn't have a powerful Executive or--and for example if you didn't have a modernized Legislature too, if you didn't have some strength in the government itself that makes it work who is empowered?

00:28:53

Alec Hansen: Yeah; well I think--

00:28:54

Evan Barrett: The economic interests were empowered.

00:28:56

Alec Hansen: Yeah; I think you see some balance now. I mean the Governor and the Executive, they've got to work together. And you know and in recent years we've had Democratic Governors and Republican Legislators and you know the guys out on the front steps of the Capital and branding irons, vetoing Bills and doing things like that but you know there is balance there and there is checks. And I think that works. You know people are always complaining about activists courts. Well courts are also part of the system. And I think up until Reorganization the courts and the Legislature might have been you know balancing each other. But the Executive did not have the authority necessary to be an effective check on the Legislature. The veto was always there but the ability to make things happen wasn't. And if you can't make things happen there's no sense being in the business.

00:29:46

Evan Barrett: Now also on the ballot in 1970 was the--the decision to call--have a vote on a Constitutional Convention. And the Legislature in '71 I mean it had to set an election and it was--there was as Special Election set for late '71 for the--for the--to rewrite our Constitution. And a lot of States were trying to rewrite Constitutions at that time, although most of them failed. Most of them failed. Tell us about how Forrest dealt with the Constitutional Convention issue from--as you saw it from the inside.

00:30:23

Alec Hansen: Well you know the Constitutional Convention was no different than a session of Legislature. I mean that place was crawling with the lobbyists. You know everybody was trying to get in there and protect or promote their interests, you know not in the laws of the--you know the statutes put in the Constitution.

00:30:40

Evan Barrett: And then the big law.

00:30:42

Alec Hansen: Yeah; but what was interesting about that and you know I'm just kind of--I knew a lot of those people. I remember laying kind of back to Butte, but the people that were sent from Butte over to Helena to represent Silver Bow County in the Constitutional Convention were very well qualified people. Now some of the best attorneys in town, you know served in the Constitutional Convention. These people were very intelligent. They understood the challenge. And they found a way to get it done. You know and I mean it was interesting; it was--it was fascinating to watch how that thing you know proceeded. And some of the debates in the Constitutional Convention are some of the best you'll ever hear. I mean you got like guys Wade Hood and Dave Hall and then Leo Grable and people like that; there were a lot of women there that really care about government.

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You know and the League of Women Voters and groups like that were really underestimated--

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Evan Barrett: And there weren't women in the Legislature to any degree at that point so that was really a new thing. And there were all these women--

00:31:43

Alec Hansen: Yeah.

00:31:44

Evan Barrett: --in the Constitutional Convention.

00:31:45

Alec Hansen: And then you have to remember that this was like probably the most progressive period in Montana history. You know I mean we're coming out of Vietnam and I mean the Environmental Movement is emerging. And there was a whole new attitude in Montana, I mean and power sort of had seemed to flow to the people. I mean it wasn't--you know the Anaconda Company couldn't get its way anymore. The Montana Power Company, I mean Forrest if he had a political problem he didn't recognize the importance of the Environmental Movement in Montana. You now I mean he did a lot of things that benefited the Environmental Movement but he was still focused on jobs and things like that, traditional old-style Democratic issues.

00:32:26

But you know the Constitutional Convention changed everything. I mean there were a lot of women. I bet there were 20 women in the Constitutional Convention.

00:32:33

Evan Barrett: Yeah; pretty close, yeah.

00:32:35

Alec Hansen: And a lot of really bright capable people, a lot of attorneys that weren't there to promote an interest but they were there--they were like given an assignment. We have to write a new Constitution. They took it very seriously and they did it very well.

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Evan Barrett: And by the way the--one of the unique things was that the--the Chairman or the President Leo Grable made a decision and they voted on it and accepted it to have them sit alphabetically so they didn't split up by Party.

00:33:04

Alec Hansen: Yeah; well they--yeah.

00:33:05

Evan Barrett: And it made a big difference.

00:33:06

Alec Hansen: There were no Parties. It was nonpartisan.

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Evan Barrett: Oh no; it wasn't. That's not true.

00:33:09

Alec Hansen: Was it true? Oh yeah; I--I didn't realize--

00:33:10

Evan Barrett: There were 59 Democrats.

00:33:12

Alec Hansen: Oh I didn't realize that.

00:33:12

Evan Barrett: Yeah; now by the way I want to mention this--

00:33:15

Alec Hansen: There's a great story about that.

00:33:17

Evan Barrett: --this--just this very quickly, this edition of the *Montana Magazine* has got a great, great article in it about Forrest Anderson. And it's called--let's see what do they call it? *Forrest Anderson, the 1972 Constitution and the Reshaping of Montana*. And it's--Brian [Shovers] wrote it and if you don't--if you get a chance get this. I'm just saying to the viewers; get a chance to take a look at this article. It's a wonderful article and it talks about his interface with the Constitution and how he helped shape getting it going. But he kind of let them have their hand to do it. But it was interesting that when--and then we'll get back to your story here, but it was interesting that when the vote occurred in the middle of the Primary Election in 1972 on it, it passed by about 2,000 votes. And there were some people suggested it didn't have an absolute majority and Forrest signed the Constitution and they turned it into Frank Murray--were you part of that?

00:34:19

Alec Hansen: Yeah.

00:34:19

Evan Barrett: Tell us about that because didn't he have to resign it a second time in front of Frank?

00:34:23

Alec Hansen: Yeah; well there was a lot of controversy over the Constitution. This is a very big change and it--things are coming fast. And people are getting a little--a little timid; you know they're--it's a very progressive time in Montana but still you know there's a lot of changes coming. And there was a lot of opposition to the Constitution, and people that had it their way under the old document and didn't want to see this happen. And so it was a very, very close election. It was about 2,000 votes.

00:34:51

I think it was Mike Mansfield who might have been on the ballot that time and Mike Mansfield always drew a great vote. And more people voted in the Senate Election than voted on the Constitutional Question. So the number of people that voted for the Constitution was not a majority of all the people that voted in the election. It was a majority on the question but it wasn't a majority of all those who voted.

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And so that was the challenge and they were going to go to court. So Forrest signed the Constitution. And Frank Murray refused to witness his signature which would make it official. So they had--

00:35:29

Evan Barrett: Because he wasn't physically present when he signed it?

00:35:29

Alec Hansen: Yeah; so they had a Land Board meeting and they went through some documents and he said to Frank what about the Constitution? He said I won't witness your signature. And he said well, there it is and he had me in the room and I had a camera and we took a picture. Frank was from Butte and he said what's he doing here? And we took a picture. I still have the picture. And Forrest signed the Constitution. And we had a picture of Frank sitting in the room watching him sign it which is technically witnessing it. And that's how that happened.

00:36:01

Evan Barrett: That's how the Constitution got done. By the way the--you're right about lack of a majority but it was not based upon--because it was in the Primary but it was based upon the fact that the side issues, the--the death penalty and gambling and Unicameral Legislature garnered a lot more votes than the main body.

00:36:20

Alec Hansen: Yeah.

00:36:21

Evan Barrett: And that's made him make that case go to the court, but he--he made Frank witness it after all?

00:36:27

Alec Hansen: Yeah; yeah at a Land Board meeting. You know there's a funny--funny story about the Constitution. You know the City of Helena passed a nonsmoking ordinance. You couldn't smoke in bars any more. Jeez that was a big controversy in this town. So the--they went to court, tavern owners and they got the thing stopped. So the City of Helena was you know defending their position and they hired an attorney uptown. And he called me up and he says I got in an argument and I want to--you know on this nonsmoking ordinance. Tell me what you think.

00:37:01

And I says okay; and he says well don't you think that clean indoor air is protected by the Constitution under the right to a quality environment? And I said I don't think you can infer that if you've ever watched **[Laughs]** the videotape of the Constitutional Convention. And you get up there and debate on the clean and healthy environment and one of the Speakers is Wade **[Duitt]** and he's got a big cigar **[Laughs]**--.

00:37:32

Evan Barrett: Yeah; right. **[Laughs]**

00:37:32

Alec Hansen: And you can't even make out the people in the room and there's so much smoke in there. There was an ashtray on every desk and I think--

00:37:39

Evan Barrett: They used to do that in those days; yeah.

00:37:41

Alec Hansen: --and I said no. I don't think you can--I don't think they were talking about clean indoor air when they were debating that particular Article.

00:37:48

Evan Barrett: Well at least the smoke-filled room was actually where the Representatives were present, all of them you know.

00:37:54

Alec Hansen: Yeah; oh yeah, yeah you could--you know you could smoke a ham in that place [*Laughs*] in the old days. It was great. I used to smoke and I enjoyed smoking. It was good.

00:38:06

Evan Barrett: Yeah; tell us about when the folks came to Forrest about the filming of the Dustin Hoffman movie.

00:38:14

Alec Hansen: Oh yeah; well you know smart people have good senses of humor and they're witty. You know you--if you--witty people are generally pretty smart. And Forrest Anderson never tried to be funny. I mean he--you meet guys in a bar they'll tell you a joke. I heard a great story. He never told you a story. I mean but he was funny because he was more practical than anybody else and so when you--people would be talking about something and he'd say what he thought, it was funny because it was so damn practical and people would sit around and say Jesus Christ; I wish I had thought of that.

00:38:47

But anyway they made this movie down around Billings called *Little Big Man* with Dustin Hoffman. And some guy from the movie studio, they had the world premier down in Billings at the Babcock Theater. A guy from--Forrest Anderson was about 5'4" you know a little tiny guy. He looked big, but he wasn't. He wasn't very big at all. And some guy called me from the movie studio and he said we're having our premier tonight. Would the Governor be willing to proclaim *Little Big Man Day* in Montana in honor of our premier? And I said well he's back there. Let me go ask him.

00:39:21

So I went back and I said they want to have you to proclaim *Little Big Man Day* in Montana. He says you tell that phony Hollywood guy every day in Montana is *Little Big Man Day*.

00:39:33

Evan Barrett: Every day is *Little Big Man Day*. [*Laughs*]

00:39:36

Alec Hansen: He was a funny guy. I mean you know the thing in Miles City but--you know he was interesting to talk to. You know and like I said you know he was so well--but he was a really smart guy. I mean he was clever, but not cunning. Just he understood you know and I learned so much from him and everybody that ever worked for him you know valued the time that they spent with him. And I can't think of anybody that ever did work for him that really didn't like him.

00:40:04

You know people say he was kind of brusque and he was--you know he kind of kept to himself and he was hard to work for, I never saw that; I mean he was a generous guy. And I mean you know he--to be around him, every hour you spent with that guy advanced your education. I mean everything I've been able to do you know in this business, 33 years working for the League of Studies most of what I know is based on what I learned in those 3 years with Forrest.

00:40:33

Evan Barrett: Yeah; yeah.

00:40:34

Alec Hansen: I mean then a lot of people--a lot of people are gone now. A lot of your friends worked there and I bet you they told you the same thing.

00:40:43

Evan Barrett: Well there's a huge respect for Forrest and you know and--and history I think is--treats him kindly. And the more time passes, the more I think people begin to realize how important he was in terms of the--the

emergence of the Constitution at that time, the Reorganizing of the--the Legislature--or the Executive, and--and the sales tax stuff, too.

00:41:09

Let's jump back into that sales tax in '71 because when--when the Reorganization Commission finished its work and had a Bill in 1971 that went to the Legislature it had the Constitution--Constitutional Amendment passed overwhelmingly, 70-percent, so they had to Reorganize the Executive. They could put it off for two years but he had the hammer on them because of the Constitution. But that year there was a big, big battle in the '71 Session over the sales tax. It came back again after being away for two years. And it--it culminated at the end of the year but the--the big fight was in the Legislature. They never could come together on that.

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Alec Hansen: Well it came back and in those days the Legislature lasted 60 days.

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Evan Barrett: Sixty calendar days.

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Alec Hansen: Yeah; so you know they were under--but they couldn't get their work done. They put a shroud over the clock. And they pretended like time had stopped.

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Evan Barrett: It was the fifty-ninth day or sixtieth day and it was midnight they covered the clock and kept working until--

00:42:15

Alec Hansen: So yeah; they went 104 days and they were deadlocked in the House 50/50, no new changes or vote. You know and it was 49 Republicans voting for the sales tax, but 1 or 2 voting against it. I mean it--it didn't change much. But one of the people that was against the sales tax was Ed Smith from Dagmar.

00:42:34

Evan Barrett: Big Ed Smith.

00:42:36

Alec Hansen: Yeah; who later ran for Governor. And so I mean they'd come in and did anybody change their mind? No; they'd adjourn for the day. This went on 104 days and went into the middle of June. And I'll never forget that; that's the year I got married, you know things were kind of-- We--my wife and I had planned to take a trip you know but the Special Session was hanging over it and all that. So that wasn't such a good thing.

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But finally you know Forrest said we got a deal. And they negotiated the deal. And this was a pure stroke of genius. You could back then put an either/or proposition on the ballot. You could put a choice. You can't do that anymore. It's not allowed by the Federal interpretation of the Federal--.

00:43:24

So the choice between the--for the voters of Montana was--I think it was a 40-percent--

00:43:31

Evan Barrett: Forty-percent surcharge.

00:43:31

Alec Hansen: --income tax surcharge or a 2-percent sales tax. And so you know the campaign went on and the-- you know and you guys at the Party were instrumental in revealing where the sources of funding for the pro sales tax forces were coming from. As you might imagine there are always the big corporations and people like that. But you know Montana, there's a lot of resistance to a sales tax. And once the--you know the funding story came out you know then you could just feel the sales tax effort had just lost steam. It was just dead in the water. So people voted for the, you know the 40-percent income tax surcharge, you know by a 3 to 1 margin, by a significant margin.

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I'll never forget he came in the office the next day and it was--you know he had on a great-looking suit and a snappy tie and he's kind of happy and he didn't show a lot of emotion. Somebody said why are you so happy? He says I'm probably the first Governor in the history of the United States to raise taxes 40-percent and didn't get lynched overnight. **[Laughs]** And that--people did not want that sales tax; you know and like I said many times, you know sales tax is not a popular idea in Montana.

00:44:53

Evan Barrett: Well and part of it of course was the sales tax was permanent and the surcharge was temporary. And so it got them past the problem. They--they went--remember they went and they had Committees and they had Special Sessions and they had two Special Sessions and extraordinary Sessions that kept going, all those days, and they had Summit Committees and Foothills Committees and everything else. And it wasn't until they forged this deal to put it on the ballot and the--the gentleman that was in charge on the Republican side was Jim Lucas, who was of course a great--a great guy, very brilliant lawyer from Miles City. But he was locked stock and barrel on the sales tax and it--he never had a--he never had a political future after that.

00:45:37

Alec Hansen: No. And you know it's kind of interesting; you know the--I don't know what kind of--what kind of promises were made or what kind of deal was involved but you know to get those guys to agree to go back to the ballot with the sales tax you know after the '68 Election I think it was a strategic error on their part.

00:46:02

They might have been able to win in the Legislature; it would have been a hell of a lot easier to get one vote in the House than it would have been to get a majority across the State of Montana. **[Laughs]** I mean that was a technical error. You know the Governor would have vetoed it but you know then the next time maybe not. So there's all kinds of things there and that thing going on the ballot, I mean that--that just about demolished the Republican Party in Montana for 10 years.

00:46:29

Evan Barrett: Yeah; it did.

00:46:30

Alec Hansen: You had Democratic majorities in the--the Legislature up until the--you know late '70s.

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Evan Barrett: Well if you look at it it's--it's indicative of that empowerment of the people that is part of the *crucible of change*.

00:46:48

Alec Hansen: Yeah.

00:46:48

Evan Barrett: It was--if you left it into the Legislative Hallways where the lobbyists were strong things may not have happened. But the Constitutional Convention ended up being voted on and they were going to have a Convention and then they voted on what they--they did and they voted on the 20's Plenty Amendment and they voted on the sales tax. And by the way, the interesting coincidence of this is that the Sales Tax Election was piggybacked onto the Con-Con Election.

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Now the Con-Con Election for Delegates for the Constitution Convention was set for November of '71 and they were looking for a convenient place to put the sales tax on the ballot and it was on the ballot in '71. And what it did was people were so overwhelmingly rejecting the Republican position that the Constitutional Convention emerged with 59 Democrats out of 100. And it was like wait a minute; this made a big difference. So the--so the voice of the people and I think Forrest instinctively understood that--that where the folks were.

00:47:58

I guess you don't do that kind of history of being involved for so long without understanding that.

00:48:01

Alec Hansen: Well he never lost an election. How many guys can say that?

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Evan Barrett: Yeah; yeah he never did. So we're--we're looking at that; that made a difference. Now as you--as we went into--had the Reorganized Executive Branch, a new Constitution, the sales tax debacle for the Republicans, so as you went into the '72 Election tell us about what happened as Forrest ended up deciding that he--finding that he couldn't run for reelection.

00:48:36

Alec Hansen: Well you know he had--had some medical problems and he had a--you know I don't know exactly what it was--a hiatal hernia or something and you know he had--he'd had it--. It's a great story about it; there was a guy that Forrest really liked, a young guy that would have been Mayor of Butte one time, but he grew up in [Inaudible] in Helena, a guy named Bob McTaggart. And he traveled with the Governor and he took--he took care of him, and him and the Governor were great friends. And he was sort of like the Governor's bodyguard before there was such things.

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Forrest went out to Seattle and he claimed that they--they removed his spleen without his approval, so he sued the hospital in Seattle and it was all over the newspapers in Montana. So we were in a bar one night and Bob McTaggart was there and this old guy that was a bartender downtown Bill Condon said McTaggart, he says you're the Governor's bodyguard aren't you? He said yeah; I am. He said you're not very good at your job. He says what do you mean? He said well if you're such a good bodyguard how come the Governor lost his spleen? [Laughs]

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And so you know that was kind of the things that were going on in those days. But no; I mean you know going into the '72 Election, now he wasn't feeling well. And I knew him really well. And him and I were good friends. And I used--after he left office I used to go see him all the time. I like his family and his son is a friend of mine. And I just loved to sit and talk to him. And if you were in Forrest's house you could always smoke. That was--that was an advantage.

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But no; it was just fun to talk to him. And you know his opinion--and I asked him for advice and things like that and you know so I got to know him really well. And he was sick. He didn't feel very well. He got to a point where you know he was just on a liquid diet and things like that. And he was sick. And you know I don't know what happened there at the end, but he--he did not feel very good. So he couldn't run. And Tom Judge had been sitting there you know chomping--you know he was pawing at the ground getting ready to run for Governor. You know when he was elected Lieutenant Governor in '68 that was before the new Constitution and they--

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Evan Barrett: They were separate.

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Alec Hansen: --yeah the offices were separate you know so they were never really close. You know it wasn't a team like it is now. You don't go pick somebody and put them in the office down the hall. I mean Judge was there. He was elected separately from the Governor. And they weren't a lot alike. And it wasn't really a team. But Forrest handed Judge a great opportunity to be Governor and he took full advantage of it and he won that election and he won the next one.

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And you know Tom Judge, I think was a good Governor. He was progressive. He was more progressive than Forrest. I mean he was more attuned to the Environmental Movement and things like that. He did quite a bit of good work on the institutional side. And actually he was a good Governor.

00:51:41

Evan Barrett: If you look at it Tom Judge was elected at the age of 38 as Governor which means he was 34 when he was elected Lieutenant Governor and you know he was clearly in the flow of kind of the emerging electorate at that time.

00:51:56

Alec Hansen: Oh yeah; yeah.

00:51:56

Evan Barrett: It was an interesting story about delegating because some people think that Forrest delegated a lot and yet he seemed to have his hands on the control of the--the government by virtue of who he talked to. I think Ted Swinden said that you know he was called by Gordon Bennett and said the Governor would like to have you be the Land Commissioner and he said give me a day to figure it out. And then you know after about a day he was trying to figure it out and Gordon called back and says you know the Governor is not a patient man. We'd like to have an answer. And so they got an answer and he came up and--and Ted said I went in the office and--and the Governor said do A, B, C, and D and don't get in any trouble and you won't hear from me.

00:52:39

Alec Hansen: Yeah; that's exactly the way it was. I--when I got hired I--I had been working at the paper in Butte and somebody in the Legislature told me the Governor was looking for a guy and I've always been kind of interested in politics. So I called and got an interview and I came over to see the Governor. He couldn't meet with me in the morning because he had got stung by a bee and his hand had swollen up. **[Laughs]** So I sat around and I went back to see him, and we talked for a little while. And you know the first thing--the first impression I had was--literally he was a small guy. That's what he told me one time; *I'm for the little people.* **[Laughs]**

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But so you know we had a nice talk and I left and I figured well, you know I didn't know if I wanted to leave Butte and then the other thing is you know I didn't know if the interview had gone very well. So I forgot all about it.

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And one night one of the old-time reporters there came in the office; he worked days and I worked nights. And he happened to come in. I think he came in to get some money out of his--. And he says the Governor called me today wanting to know about you. I said what did you tell him? He said I told him you're a good kid. So thank you.

00:53:50

So about a week later my mother called me and she said what the hell have you done now? And I said what do you mean? She said I got a letter here from the Governor of Montana [*Laughs*]. I said open that up and read it for me. She said--read it; Dear Alec it was nice to meet you--and whatever it was. If you want the job you can start Tuesday. And that was it. [*Laughs*] I showed up and went to work and he told me here's what I want you to do. Do it and you and I will get along fine; if you don't I'll find another guy. That was the simple easy way to do it; you knew where you stood. And that's the perfect place to be.

00:54:27

Evan Barrett: He had an interesting mixture of very young people. You were young. I was young. Most of the people in our Reorganization staff; Frank [Senate] was young, Gary Wicks was young, the staff was young, and yet there were seasoned people in there. There was Gordon Bennett around and--and folks like that--that were--it was an interesting mixture of--and Duke Crowley and an interesting mixture of the--the younger and more-seasoned people that he drew to him.

00:54:53

Alec Hansen: Kind of funny; I mean I didn't know much about the Legislature when I showed up over here, but by '71 I figured I knew my way around a little bit. So I had the Governor's office budget; go up to talk to the Chairman of the Subcommittee and look at the budget. And the talking point was we had fewer people and we were paying lower salaries than the Republicans had ever paid. And there should be no problem, you know getting this budget approved.

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Evan Barrett: Good management.

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Alec Hansen: I go up and I talk--yeah; I go up and I talk to the guy and a guy named Tom Haines, he's a Senator from Missoula. He also happened to be the Chairman of the--or I mean the President of Montana Food Distributors.

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Evan Barrett: Tom Haines; yeah, yeah.

00:55:40

Alec Hansen: Food Distributors Association. And they had a Bill in that Session of the Legislature to allow them to sell wine in grocery stores. So I go up there and I lay it all out for Senator Haines and he said well, he said how old are you? I said I'm 26. What about this other guy? Well he's 26 and the other guy is 24 and Ron Richards, he's the boss; he's the oldest.

00:56:04

Evan Barrett: He wasn't that old.

00:56:05

Alec Hansen: He's the old guy; he's 31. He says you know this really bothers me. It's an awful lot of money for a bunch of green horns. **[Laughs]** So I went back downstairs. So I told Forrest. He said you go back up; you tell that guy if he wants to ever sell a bottle of wine in a grocery store in the State of Montana he'll take another look at that budget. So I told the guy; I delivered the message.

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He looks at me and he says you know what I like about this? I says what's that Senator? He says young people are interested in government again. **[Laughs]** My mother was still alive. I called my mother. I said you know I went to college and I took political science and I hung around the courthouse. I thought I knew this. I said I found the secret today; it's magic. It's leverage. You got to know where to put the pole under the rock to move things. And I figured it out today. I said I don't know it all but I know how it's done and that's very nice to know. **[Laughs]** And it was; it was magical and the guy just boom changed his mind just like that. And that works.

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Evan Barrett: He--he knew the--the pressure, the leveraging points. You know we're--we're just about running out--this hour has gone by very, very fast. And I wondered if you might have some kind of summary words, some evaluation words about how--about Forrest Anderson as someone who worked for him for almost all of his term.

00:57:27

Alec Hansen: Yeah; well I said this many, many times. I mean coming here, working for him changed my life. And I am grateful for that. But what I remember about him, I've said this; he's probably the smartest guy that I have ever met in politics. And I mean he really knew what he was doing. He's also one of the most imposing people I've ever met. You know like I said, he was 5'4" tall but he would fill a room. He knew what he was doing and that showed. And he had--you know he had self-confidence. And he always you know had the--he knew where we were going. And we had a meeting and I'll never forget it, a big budget crisis. This was before the Sales Tax Election.

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And I said Governor you're in the box, so I went to Billings with him on the plane and I said how are you going to get out of the box? He says they haven't built the box I can't get out of. **[Laughs]** That was the sales tax deal. But you know the guy was just--that kind of a guy and he filled up the room.

00:58:27

Evan Barrett: What we're going to end up doing is through a whole series of programs *In the Crucible of Change* we're going to talk about how Forrest Anderson influenced the big changes in Montana that we're talking about here probably more than anybody else. So, thank you for being our guest here today.

00:58:44

Alec Hansen: Oh yeah; I mean thank you for having me. I mean I love talking about what happened and I love trying to remind people that there was a time when government worked and people got things done and he was a big part of it, so thanks.

00:58:57

Evan Barrett: Thank you.

00:59:01

[*Music*]

00:59:58

[End Alec Hansen-Governor Forrest Anderson's Leadership & Political Acumen]